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George L. Mosse

National Cemeteries and National Revival: The Cult of the Fallen Soldiers in Germany

The new interest in the history of attitudes to death has not yet considered the cult of the fallen soldier. This is a curious omission, not only because this cult is central to the development of nationalism, but also because it changed men's view of death itself. Indeed, its history is, on the one hand, part and parcel of the secularization of established religion, and on the other, one factor in the brutalization of consciousness which informed the violence between the two world wars.

The German wars of liberation must stand at the beginning of our discussion, for here volunteers flocked to the colours, while poets and writers created a myth of heroism and sacrifice. Those who fell were no longer mercenaries nor, as far as the myth was concerned, forcibly impressed, but patriots who gladly laid down their lives on the altar of the fatherland. Herder, not yet influenced by this war experience, thought of death as a gentle sight, one of rest and tranquillity; while Theodor Körner, volunteer and patriot, rhymed: 'Shall I die prosaically? Poetry, you source of fire, unleash your destruction, but quickly.'¹

Such exaltation pre-figured the first world war. The myth of the wars of liberation served to inspire later legends about the front-line soldier. Volunteers were again the centre of such myths, and were often their creators as well; volunteers symbolized joyous sacrifice. Certainly at times during the first world war reality corresponded to myth. A study of soldiers' songs has demonstrated that while older conscripts sang nostalgically of family and home, young volunteers preferred more stirring songs of battle and

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victory.² The cult of the fallen was embedded in such enthusiasm, especially as volunteers believed themselves to be a consecrated elite. Not only the Free Corps during the wars of liberation were blessed in church, but also many troops in the first world war: 'Now we are made sacred.'³ Fighting and dying became a sacred duty, a way out of the routine of daily life.

Schiller had already glorified the soldier as standing above the daily anxieties of life.⁴ Indeed, many songs from the earlier wars exalt the freedom of soldiers who are no longer prisoners of daily routine. Death in war crowned such liberty. Schiller, typically enough, wrote in one breath about looking death in the eye and that 'only the soldier is free'.⁵ During the first world war, Walter Flex felt that death in the face of the enemy completed the moral structure of each person.⁶ In short, death in war made life meaningful, even if that life was devoid of meaning until the moment of sacrifice. Modern war became a kind of festival, an extraordinary event which enabled men to reach for higher things.⁷ Such longing for new experiences was shared by the volunteers in the wars of liberation and in the first world war.

To be sure, the reality of the front lines was different, and many soldiers became disillusioned and cynical. The spirit of the volunteers and the cult of the fallen soldier were myths but, like all myths, they were based upon reality, however partial (certainly during the initial enthusiasm for the war and even later). Carried upon the shoulders of the volunteers, the myth of the war experience survived the disillusionment and continued into the post-war world. Such a patriotic myth could never have lasted so long if it had not met a real need. During the war it helped men to face unparalleled slaughter: the fear of one's own death and an existence only too often surrounded by the bodies of fallen comrades. Moreover, once peace came, and with it defeat and revolution, it explained why the dead had not fallen in vain and why the veterans had made their sacrifice. No doubt, for many, battle became a 'permanent condition of life' as Ernst Jünger put it, looking back to the war but also forward into the peace.⁸

Like all cults, the cult of the fallen was built upon deeply rooted traditions: in the face of battle men needed solid ground in order to cope with an entirely new experience, and the same held true for the shock of the post-war world. The longing for the exceptional, for the festival, had such roots going back over a century.⁹ However, it was in the decades just before the outbreak of the first world war

that the search for a way out of the general boredom, an ill-defined malaise, became commonplace among intellectuals. Eventually it was they who were to articulate the war experience, heightening the longing for the exceptional, the sacred in life. Thus Richard Dehmel, destined to write many war poems, cried, 'Sing me a song of death and life. . . we seem to float above life which clings to us.'¹⁰ Perhaps even more to the point, a follower of Nietzsche exclaimed in 1910, 'Let war come! It is lurking all about us in glittering spires of cloud. . . perhaps out of it something new will be born.'¹¹ The grandeur of war was praised as lifting the human heart high 'above earthly, human life'.¹² The Expressionists with their love for the extraordinary, the episodic, their efforts to transcend the present, gave a new élan to this longing. Georg Heym confided to his diary in 1910 that he found life 'boring, so boring'. If barricades were erected, he would be the first to mount them and to feel, even with a bullet in his breast, a flicker of enthusiasm.¹³ Surely this is reminiscent of Körner's wish to die quickly. For many during those years, war was the ideal environment for the 'writer in extremis', for the death of convention, the defeat of the older generation and the apotheosis of youth.

The conflict between generations became a part of the joy in battle and the fallen symbolized the triumph of youth. 'Young Siegfried' was a popular figure in *Heldenhaine* (Heroes' Groves) and war memorials. Looking back at the war memorials of the first world war, Karl von Seeger wrote in 1930: 'The ideals of Greek art are still valid; the type of naked, lithe and muscular youth, filled with spirit and will, symbolizes perfect humanity.'¹⁴ Others marvelled at the sacrifice of youth, and saw a parallel between such heroes and Germany as a young nation. Heroes' Groves (to which we shall return) were said to symbolize both the fallen and Germany's eternal youth. Siegfried was a young Apollo and so was Germany.¹⁵ This praise of youth was sung, for the most part, by those too old to fight at the front. However, this was by no means always the case: we find it implicit in the eroticism of Walter Flex's description of his friend Wurche, and also in Ernst Jünger's praise of war. Exaltation of youth often accompanied the ideal of camaraderie. It seems difficult to classify the ideals of those who wrote about the war by generations or by their front-line experience. Maurice Rieuneau may well be right that in France the most ardent nationalists belonged to the generation of Maurice Barrès, i.e. men who never saw battle. Yet he also discusses the

spirit of heroism common to those who became adults under the strain of baptism by fire.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the quest for 'higher things' separated the front-line soldier from those leading ordinary lives, and this both in myth and in reality. War was not just a quest for the extraordinary, the great experience, but was considered a cosmic process by those who preached its myth. Within this process the cult of the fallen occupied a central position. Not only did it symbolize the eternal rhythm of life and death, but in war cemeteries and war monuments the abstract became concrete and could be touched and worshipped.

The cult of the fallen assimilated the basic themes of a familiar and congenial Christianity. The exclamation 'Now we are made sacred' implied an analogy of the sacrifice in war to the passion and resurrection of Christ. Of all the traditions we have mentioned, it was Christianity as popular piety which provided the most solid ground from which the war experience could be faced. This seems much more relevant than the so-called war theology which was preached at home and at the front. Soldiers had a low opinion of most clergy; thus, a non-clerical, non-establishment Christianity triumphed in this extreme situation — a popular piety which saw hope in suffering according to the Christian tradition.

The wars of liberation had already been likened to the Last Supper, and now Walter Flex, one of the chief myth-makers of the first world war, repeated this analogy: the war is the Last Supper, it is one of the chief revelations through which Christ illuminates the world. The sacrificial death of the best of our people, he continued, is only a repetition of the passion of Christ.¹⁷ The passion leads to the resurrection: 'On Christmas night the dead talk in human voices.'¹⁸ Here, the stages in Christ's passion are made relevant to the modern war experience. Max von Schenkendorf had exclaimed in 1813, 'The fatherland is risen again, O what a wonderful Easter.'¹⁹ During the first world war, the 'war Christmas' attained a special importance which has not yet been properly analysed. The festival was a reminder of home and family, a moment of normality in the trenches as parcels were opened and an attempt was made to provide a festive board. But the fallen were present as well, remembered in speeches and thoughts; indeed the 'war Christmas' was partly a reminder of home and partly a memorial to the fallen.²⁰

Walter Flex in his 'Christmas Fable' tells of a war widow who

drowns herself and her son. They are restored to life through an encounter with soldiers' ghosts. Personal resurrection pre-figures the more general mission of the fallen to bring hope and redemption. Flex likened the dead soldiers to the angels who brought the news of Christ's birth to the shepherds.²¹ For Ludwig Ganghofer, a popular writer of an older generation, Germany itself symbolized the three Magi guided by the star to Bethlehem.²² Germany became the divine instrument for the salvation of the world.

During the war such ideas were voiced from time to time, not only by Flex but, for example, in Julius Zerzer's *The Mass in War* [*Kriegsmesse 1914*] where the life and death of soldiers was integrated with the rhythm of the Mass itself. But it is after the collapse of Germany that the dead truly come alive and that the regenerative function of the myth is fully exploited. *A Tribute to the Army and Navy* (1920) asserted that the fallen have found no rest, they roam Germany, their pale masks of death as immovable as in the moment when they gave their lives for their country. The fallen are returning in order to rejuvenate the Volk, for 'to fight, to die, to be resurrected — that is the essence of being. From [their] death the Volk will be restored.'²³ This tribute came from the political right, but the Weimar Republic itself picked up this theme. The official guide to German war memorials stated that the fallen had risen from their graves and visited Germans in the dead of night in order to exhort them to resurrect the fatherland.²⁴ Familiar ghost stories were infused with themes of Christian resurrection in order to explain away the finality of death on the battlefield and to give hope to a defeated nation.

The fallen could also be used for purposes other than the resurrection of the fatherland: all sorts of wishes were projected upon the martyrs, just as Flex's fallen soldiers saved a mother and child from drowning. The Memorial Book of the Westphalian Fire Brigades, for example, called upon the fallen to restore individualism in the face of mass society.²⁵ However, such special requests were not the rule. Moreover, not all symbols of resurrection were Christian; quite often the symbol of a rising phoenix was used. Yet, in military cemeteries the 'cross of sacrifice' which dominates the graves was usually paired with a chapel containing paintings or frescoes of the Resurrection. This is illustrated most clearly by the Italian cemetery at Redipuglia which, like Calvary, is dominated by three crosses. The chapel contains a fresco in which a soldier literally sleeps in the lap of Christ. It matters little that the

fascists built this cemetery in the 1930s, for such iconography can be found in the military cemeteries of most other nations, as a widely shared reaction to mass death in war.

After 1918 the German political right, as it sought revenge, emphasized the fusion of life and death in an almost hysterical manner, harking back to St Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Thus, the conservative Franz Schauwecker agreed with the Nazi Alfred Rosenberg that, confronted by war, life and death were identical.²⁶ The battle of Langenmarck in November 1914 was thought especially relevant to such a fusion of life and death. At Langenmarck thousands of former students and members of the German Youth Movement were mowed down as they stormed the enemy lines. This battle soon became a powerful myth. The idealization of youth found an outlet here, and moreover many of the manufacturers of such myths came from academic or youth movement backgrounds. Josef Magnus Wehner, for example, at one of the many Langenmarck memorial meetings after the war, recalled how the flower of German youth had supposedly gone singing to their deaths. These volunteers had not lost their joyous spirit of sacrifice even in the face of battle. Wehner believed that the life force of the fallen arose from their graves in order to enter living students — volunteers of future wars. The battle of Langenmarck transcended time, it could not be imprisoned in history, Rudolf Binding wrote, for it was a living myth, continually youthful and creative. Among all the peoples of the earth only German youth had the right to symbolize such eternal renewal.²⁷ Their sacrifice ennobled youth throughout the world, just as the figure of young Siegfried was used to characterize those who were buried beneath it in the Heroes' Groves.

Imperial pretensions were renewed as part of the cult of fallen youth. The German Reich knows no boundaries, Wehner asserted, and must give law and order to all mankind: sacrifice for the fatherland meant life, not death. Paul Alverdes depicted the dead of Langenmarck conversing with the living. In this dialogue each of the living takes on the role of a fallen comrade.²⁸ Here, once more, the continuity of life and death is emphasized. Eventually, the choir of Hitler Youth on Memorial Day proclaimed: 'The best of our people did not die that the living might die, but that the dead might come alive.'²⁹

The fallen did not fulfil their mission as individuals but as a community of comrades. 'Never during daily peacetime routine,'

another Memorial Book tells us, 'does man experience the meaning of giving one's all to the community. This war has taught us that.'³⁰ Indeed, the exaltation of wartime camaraderie was for the most part built upon the cult of the fallen. They became an integral part of the comradeship of the living, they were said to live on in the survivors who, in any case, could soon expect to join their ranks. The cult of the dead was seen as a living reality and not merely as an object of passive contemplation. This was certainly one theme in Flex's wartime stories. Later, Paul Alverdes, for example, stressed the crucial role of the dead in helping to cement the camaraderie of the living. Such ideas were not merely German. Henry de Montherlant in France also linked heroism in war with the cult of the fallen.³¹

The fallen were a vital part of that chain of being which, according to Livy and subsequent sages, stretched from heaven to earth. This golden chain was now said to unite heaven, the living and the dead in one Germanic brotherhood: small wonder that the fallen were almost always symbolized as a group, and that their plain rows of graves stressed the homogeneity of the war experience. As we shall see, even if the war dead were buried in civilian cemeteries their graves were kept separate by a fence or wall. Ernst Jünger is, once more, typical for the appeal of the camaraderie myth. Originally, his *The Storm of Steel* contained many of his own war memories. However, as he revised the book throughout the 1920s, personal experiences were transformed into community experiences shared among comrades.³²

The Nazis made much use of such a Volks community, going so far at one point as to attack the cult of the Unknown Soldier. The fallen were not dead, they live, for what they sowed was harvested by Adolf Hitler. Faith in Germany united the fallen and the living.³³ The Nazis stressed the commonplace: not only were analogies to the passion and resurrection of Christ used to explain away death, but war cemeteries and war monuments largely fulfilled the same function.

The war cemetery symbolized the cult of the fallen soldier. Its history has not yet been written, and we can only sketch its background while awaiting the result of further research. Such cemeteries are modern; it was only during the American civil war

that bodies were systematically collected from the battlefield for burial in one place. The soldiers' cemetery at Gettysburg (1863) was one of the first military burial-grounds, though several so-called national cemeteries had come into existence a year earlier. These were simple burial places, and no thought was given to creating a place of national worship. There is no evidence that American civil war cemeteries influenced Europe. Indeed, during a visit to the British war graves in France, King George V told his hosts that '... never before in history have a people thus dedicated and maintained individual memorials to their fallen...'.³⁴ Clearly, the king thought of this as something new and unprecedented, without knowing of the American example. Nevertheless, that first modern mass war in an age of heightened sensibilities produced the first systematic burial of all the fallen. Earlier, when soldiers were buried in mass graves where they fell, attitudes tended to be far from worshipful. People feared the stench which arose from the battlefields.³⁵

Some small cemeteries were made here and there during the German wars of liberation. These struck later observers by their laudable simplicity — unadorned stone tablets set in uniform graves. However, monuments, not cemeteries, were the usual way to remember the fallen at that early date. For example, until the first world war, only the graves of military leaders were singled out for special attention. As late as the Franco-Prussian war the bodies of soldiers were usually left to decay where they had fallen,³⁶ or their bones collected in a nearby charnel-house (as the Baedeker for northern France (1889) tells us in its description of the battlefields). Military cemeteries for the concentration of individual graves and as places of worship were, in Europe at least, the results of the unprecedented slaughter of the first world war.

The most important models derived both from the French Enlightenment and the wars of liberation. The serried rows of graves date from the eighteenth century, a phenomenon stimulated partly by sanitary considerations and partly by the quest for equality during the French revolution. Sometimes graves were opened and individuals transferred to family crypts,³⁷ something that was feared for sanitary reasons, reflecting a greater consciousness of smells which had arisen during the second half of the eighteenth century. Now cemeteries were transferred outside the city itself in order to prevent contamination by foul odours, and it was possible to plan the new cemeteries more rationally than burials in the local

churchyard. Thus, we hear from Berne in 1761 that no graves should be opened, and that rows of graves should be spaced in an orderly manner.³⁸

The French revolution encouraged rows of graves because 'equality must be maintained in the cemetery as in towns. Liberty does not depend on riches', as Cambry wrote in his *Rapport sur les Sépultres* [Essay on Tombs](1792). Moreover, the decree of 12 June 1804 laid down that the bodies of the poor should be buried side by side and not on top of each other as had been the custom.³⁹ Separate tombs were no longer a privilege for those able to pay, but became the rule, and they too were set in rows. The new cemetery of Montmartre, however, did allow some individuality, and a special place was reserved for the ashes of 'great men'. Here the classical revival determined the form and style of graves, and this meant a certain simplicity. When it came to remember those fallen in the wars of liberation, Germany, the country of Winckelmann, emphasized the absence of ornament and the harmony and symmetry of the memorials. Greek simplicity was fused with the ideal of soldierly comportment, as illustrated, for example, by the monument commemorating the fallen of 1813 in the Garrison Church in Potsdam.⁴⁰

Military cemeteries of the first world war built upon such precedents. Moreover, they now became self-conscious in a manner unusual in the nineteenth century. The distinction between soldiers' and bourgeois burial-grounds, made as early as 1915, is important here: bourgeois cemeteries were said to be materialistic in the exaggerated boastfulness of their monuments, but soldiers' cemeteries were simple, symbolizing wartime camaraderie: 'Gravestones through their simplicity and uniformity, like soldiers in battle, lead into a serious and reverential mood.'⁴¹ Two years later, at a meeting of the garden society of Württemberg [*Württembergischer Gartenbau-Verein*] dedicated to war cemeteries, the famed architect Paul Bonatz made the identical distinction between soldiers' and bourgeois cemeteries: the former were characterized by order and the subordination of the individual to the community, while the latter emphasized personal freedom.⁴² Here soldier and bourgeois confronted each other and the cemeteries were symbolic of the ever-present conflict between the front-line soldier and the home front.

Bonatz viewed the rows of graves themselves as monuments to the fallen because they conveyed a sense of harmony within an

enclosed space.⁴³ Indeed, a clearly defined space was vital to military cemeteries, as it is and has been for all places of worship.

Much thought was given to the surrounding walls. Should they be strong stone walls like those which enclosed monasteries, ancient village churches or landed estates?⁴⁴ An official army publication pointed out that it was easier to collect one's thoughts in a well-defined space than in one which merges with its surroundings. To be sure, it continues, a feeling of reverence can be produced by the lonely grave in a wood or field, but for serried ranks of graves an enclosed space is vital.⁴⁵ Clearly, military graves had to be separate, even if they were within civilian cemeteries. They were places of worship and must be treated as such. In fact, when fallen soldiers were removed to the family crypt, such action was seen as a kind of betrayal of those who had been 'comrades among comrades'.⁴⁶

Emperor William II, in his directive of 28 February 1917 to the Prussian minister of war concerning military cemeteries, summed up these ideas: cemeteries should be designed with 'soldierly simplicity' in mind, in harmony with surrounding nature; differences of rank should be avoided; and if possible those created at the front, during the fighting, 'by comrades', should be kept intact. A permanent commission of service artists was established for each base and government-general in order to supervise cemetery design, which was also centrally controlled after the war, even down to the shrubs and flowers.⁴⁷

There was fear that war graves might lose their simplicity and become ornate — the monuments to the war of 1870-71 were constantly cited as a bad example. But the danger most often descried by architects and garden societies was that memorials might be mass-produced. Thus, the Silesian Society for the Preservation of the Native Land [*Heimatschutz*] warned that a factory in Aachen was mass-producing large iron crosses, as well as highly polished grave-stones. The *Heimatschutz* members felt that soldiers' graves must be created by individual artists and craftsmen, not produced by factories.⁴⁸ Certainly such patriotism identified the German spirit with the medieval craftsman. The cult of the fallen was the enemy of supposedly soulless modernity, just as the military cemetery clashed with that of the bourgeoisie. Pre-industrial nostalgia formed a crucial part of the cult and of the design of such cemeteries. It was the French, so we are told, who put their war memorials at the centre of bustling cities, while the Germans

preferred untainted, natural surroundings.⁴⁹

Traditional opposition to modernity was part of the 'eternal spirit' of the fallen, exemplified by the rejection of mass-production, and, as we saw earlier, by the appeal that the fallen should put an end to mass society. Nature, as we shall see later, also symbolized the eternal as opposed to the restless modern spirit, and war cemeteries emphasized their natural settings. Moreover, as opposed to the existing state, comradeship in the trenches was thought to be a community of affinity [*Gemeinschaft*] not a society enforced from above [*Gesellschaft*]. The longing for such a community had accompanied the rise of national consciousness in the nineteenth century and now the cult of the fallen was to remind the living of this ideal.

Another concern which pervaded the attacks against mass production was that the places of worship might become trivialized. This was no idle fear. For example, an exhibition called 'War and Art', held in Munich in 1916, contained a special section of war-time kitsch. Here Hindenburg's portrait graced a huge variety of cushions, utensils and even sardine cans, while models of soldiers in uniform served as ink-stands and ashtrays. Hand-grenades and bullets were exhibited in the form of picture frames, as candles or reproduced in bars of yellow soap. The sponsors of the exhibition made fun of this kitsch, but they approved of war toys, whether they portrayed the 'English-German sea war' or conveyed the child through pictures to 'the blood-soaked soil of northern France'.⁵⁰

Such mimicry of the war must have made it acceptable to many people; a familiar 'game' in which the end was well worth the effort. Traditional games for children and adults were adapted to wartime purposes with soldiers, guns and the supposed atrocities committed by the enemy taking the place of peaceful scenes on the dice board. Both in Germany and France children were told how the real war could be mimicked through playing with tin soldiers: 'With the aid of the peashooting cannon a horrible blood bath begins until finally only a few enemy soldiers survive.'⁵¹ Moreover, not merely private enjoyment but also public spectacles were a part of the process of trivialization: plays like the popular *Der Hias* with its stereotyped officers and tableaux vivants; circuses like that of Sarasani which used machine guns as well as a cavalry charge in order to imitate the war against Russia.⁵² Moreover, almost immediately after the war the battlefields, which were meant to be places of pilgrimage, became tourist attractions. Military souvenirs

were hawked and hotels advertised modern comforts. Battlefield pilgrimages were apt to become tours organized on a large scale by Thomas Cook & Sons.⁵³

What was supposed to be an authentic experience of worship might lose its significance, though it is impossible to know how far such trivialization took place in the minds of the pilgrims who visited Flanders. Those who tried to prevent such a desecration linked it to modern mass society, mass production and mass entertainment.⁵⁴ The German spirit of reverence and worship had to reject modernity. The increasing opposition to the modern age had historical roots and fed upon defeat and revolution. But surely it was also influenced by the concrete demonstration of what a mass age could do to the shrines of heroes. Such concerns continued until after the second world war, but then only on the part of the extreme right: 'Soon war cemeteries will merely serve as a goal for the city-dwellers' Sunday afternoon walk.'⁵⁵

The concern for the design and construction of these cemeteries were partly related to a nationalist mystique and tradition, and partly to the attempt to preserve them as places of worship. These were the themes of the travelling exhibits which toured the nation, sponsored by local historical preservation societies or the semi-official commissions of artists and architects. Exaggeration in design and construction was forbidden. A simple and ascetic mood must prevail above all, and no hurried planning was allowed. Indeed, local communities rather than the families of the fallen often paid for the graves in order that simplicity and order might prevail.⁵⁶

Siting the cemeteries within their natural surroundings played a large role in their design. 'Such cemeteries must give the impression of being a part of the landscape, embedded in the bosom of eternal Mother Nature, carried along by her goodness.' This paean to nature went on to advocate the use of natural materials and castigated modern styles as merely transitory.⁵⁷ Nature symbolized the rooted and supposedly unchanging ideal of the Germanic landscape. The artisan through his craft exemplified the same genuine and eternal national spirit; thus the fear that grave-stones might be mass-produced.

The one entirely new form of military cemetery produced by the first world war was directly linked to this worship of nature. Creation of *Heldenhaine* [Heroes' Groves] was first proposed in 1914 and immediately approved by the Prussian minister of the interior.

Field Marshal von Hindenburg gave his support, and in praising the concept wrote about the 'German tree, gnarled and with solid roots, symbolic of individual and communal strength.'⁵⁸

Nature itself was to serve as a living memorial: the sacred German wood was a fitting setting for the cult of the fallen. This idea was not new, for in the eighteenth century, and later during the wars of liberation, forests of oaks had been proposed as especially meaningful burial places for patriots. As thanksgiving for the victories of 1870-71 'Emperor's Oaks' had been planted throughout the nation.⁵⁹ More recently, by 1880 the so-called park-cemeteries created in the United States between 1830 and 1850 had spread to Germany. Independently, but probably with some knowledge of the park-cemeteries, Hans Grässel designed the *Waldfriedhof* [forest cemetery] for the city of Munich (1907). For Grässel the collaboration of nature with architecture was essential for the edification of the soul and for that poetic sense so necessary in the contemplation of death. Natural surroundings were not to be left alone, but instead were to be integrated into the orderly appearance of the cemetery. 'Beauty is order,' as Grässel put it, and the poetic sense was not allowed to interfere with that harmony which was to dominate death as it was supposed to dominate life.⁶⁰

The avowed purpose of such cemeteries was to disguise death. From the curving paths in Grässel's *Waldfriedhof* no graves are to be seen, only a wood of tall trees within which the tombs are hidden. One might be strolling in any beautiful park, and it is instructive to see how this feeling is lost in the newer parts of this cemetery where graves are embedded in lawns or placed side by side in the traditional manner. Both the park and the forest cemeteries were meant to displace thoughts of death to the contemplation of nature. The dead were supposed to find rest in the same kind of surrounding which brought calm to the restless human spirit. This was a thought voiced both by Cambry during the French revolution as he contemplated the design for the new cemetery of Montmartre, and by the romantics who created the Park cemetery.⁶¹ The forest as a national symbol was linked to the forest as disguising the reality of death.

Built upon such foundations, the *Heldenhaine* were in addition to stand as symbols of the eternal hope which pervades the cycle of death and resurrection. Nature always renewed herself, just as the fallen stood for the spring which was bound to come after winter. Nature symbolized eternal cosmic values, opposed to the changing

sands of time and modernity. Moreover, if the war brought out those 'elemental forces' which characterized genuine man opposed to artificial civilization (as Jünger thought, for example), then unspoilt nature was analogous to unspoilt man in the trenches. The *Heldenhain* added such symbolism to the romanticism of its predecessors.⁶²

Proposing the *Heldenhaine*, Willy Lange, a landscape architect, called for a symbol of Germanic unity similar to the Bismarck towers, hundreds of which dotted the countryside. But unlike such towers of stone, the new Germanic heroes should possess a 'living oak' [*Lebenseiche*] through which they could continue their life even after death, and take pleasure in the sun and the stars, in the song of birds and the scent of flowers, and in the joy and suffering of the fatherland. Lange hoped that the Heroes' Groves would become sites of patriotic festivals. Thus they would perform the identical function which national monuments had served in the past: to provide an appropriate space for national cults. He also held that certain ecclesiastical celebrations, like that of Easter Sunday or Harvest Festival, could have their final ceremonies there.⁶³ Heroes' Groves not only continued the tradition of joining a permanent symbol to living and moving masses (as exemplified by many national monuments), but in their mixture of nature and Christian symbolism emphasized the theme of death and resurrection.

Numerous *Heldenhaine* came into existence. Sometimes each of the fallen had his own tree. The trees usually formed a semi-circle with an 'oak of peace' in the middle, or a simple monument as a 'reminder'. A rock or boulder was thought especially apt as it had already been singled out as symbolic of primeval power [*Urkraft*], and recommended for use as a war monument. 'Huge boulders as symbolic of Germany's fate.'⁶⁴ The proposed *Heldenhain* named in honour of Walter Flex near Eisenach, on an island opposite the Wartburg, was supposed to contain such a monument.⁶⁵ It is telling that when it came to the planning of a national war memorial during the Weimar Republic, this also took the form of a *Heldenhain*. Some designs for such a national monument included a stadium where pilgrims could gather, as well as a 'holy road' (designated by that name) leading from the stadium through the wood to the so-called square of remembrance. Moreover, sites were suggested which in the dim past had been places of Germanic worship, and which possessed gnarled oaks (of the kind Hindenburg liked so much) or massive rocks. Christian, Germanic and nature sym-

bolism were all present in many of the proposed designs. However, no such national monument was built; rival local interests prevented the weak Weimar governments from designating a site.⁶⁶

These woods were not confined to Germany. In France, Édouard Herriot called for *jardins funèbres*.⁶⁷ Furthermore, a *Heldenhain* still exists in Rome's Parioli district, where each tree carries a plaque with the name of a fallen soldier. The French cult of the war dead was sometimes similar to that in Germany. Two polls on the best way of honouring the war dead were taken in 1917 among some leading intellectuals, and the results stressed the need for simplicity in the design of cemeteries and monuments, for symbols of camaraderie rather than individuality, and the necessity of embedding such tributes in natural surroundings.⁶⁸ Similar opinions prevailed in England, though the Germans asserted that the English wanted even more uniformity in the design of individual graves than they themselves allowed.⁶⁹ Moreover, in France the myth of *debouts les morts* which Maurice Barrès had invented, and which told of dead soldiers coming to the aid of the living in battle, was revived after the war in order to prove that the fallen were not really dead and therefore must be consulted about the future of France.⁷⁰ We are only at the beginning of our research on the cult of the fallen, but it seems to contain some identical features in all warring nations, perhaps because the problems posed by the new fact of mass death were, after all, similar, as were the national and Christian traditions which determined the parameters of the cult.

The Heroes' Groves and the military cemetery dissolved thoughts of death into soothing and uplifting myths and symbols. The closed space and the serried graves subsumed the tragedy of individual death under the larger national cause. If the war experience itself had been transcendent, lifting men out of the boredom of daily life into a sacred drama where they could play meaningful roles, the cult of the fallen was at one and the same time the climax of this drama and a paradigm to future generations. The resting places of the fallen were shrines of worship dedicated to that higher purpose which the war supposedly served: the defence of the Volks community which demanded an *imitatio Christi* and which pointed to a future race of heroes. From these graves the dead rose to exhort the living to resurrect Germany after defeat; from these places of worship they descended to plead against mass society and for the restoration of those genuine, pre-industrial virtues which were exemplified by the very design and construction of their cemeteries.

The war experience was a shock which transformed the lives of many of those who had been front-line soldiers. 'After all this? Sleeping and awakening? Eating and drinking? After all this? Perhaps to marry? To have children?'⁷¹ Edwin Erich Dwinger no doubt exaggerated the effect of the war, but similar questions must have been in the minds of many soldiers. The sober guide for veterans published by the German government in 1918 made the same point in its own way: veterans had been 'completely alienated from bourgeois existence'. Through their overwhelming war experience they had lost contact with the 'necessities of life'.⁷² The cult of the fallen symbolized this exceptionality. Moreover, as death on the battlefield was translated into tangible places of worship, they provided a living reminder of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, a camaraderie strengthened by the blood of martyrs.

The Nazis built upon this cult, and revelled in ceremonies which stressed the continuity between the glorious past and the promise of the present: 'The blood of the best [of our people] has planted seeds which are now ready for that harvest which is spread so splendidly before us.'⁷³ Indeed, all fascism annexed the war experience and saw itself as inheriting the unity between the fallen and the living, the martyrs of the past and the party elite of the present.

After the second world war, although the design of military cemeteries remained the same, the cult of the fallen did not revive. Perhaps, as has been suggested,⁷⁴ the present War Graves Commission [*Kriegsgräberfürsorge*] is a substitute, if a feeble one, for the heady myth of the war experience. Yet such a commission also existed after the first world war. At that time it emphasized the cult of the fallen, and advocated national renewal. The commission which cared for war graves after the second world war was taken up with practical work and relatively uninterested in furthering a national mystique. Here, once more, it is necessary to resort to the publications of the extreme right, such as those of the SS veterans, to recapture the cult of the fallen soldier.

The cult of the fallen had become an important part of German national consciousness ever since the wars of liberation, but especially after the first world war. It gave body and substance to the camaraderie of the living and dead which supposedly formed the true nation.⁷⁵ War memorials and military cemeteries became shrines of national worship which in many ways eclipsed the traditional national monuments. Not only in Germany, but in every nation, the cult can tell us much about national consciousness and the

traditions upon which it is based.

Those who had made the final sacrifice were not dead and gone, but instead continued to perform their mission of national renewal. There could be no room for personal grief in the midst of supposedly joyous sacrifice and a life after death devoted to redeeming the Volk. The analogy to Christianity is obvious here, as it has been throughout this discussion.⁷⁶ The cult of the fallen illustrates a process of secularization which seems more important in the end than the much-discussed confrontation between religion and modernity.

It also tended to legitimize mass death in war. Yet it was not the only, but perhaps the most important, factor in this process. The trivialization of war and its mimicking in daily life must have made its horrors more familiar and therefore less frightening to a great number of people. Those devoted to the cult of the fallen feared such trivialization as part of a hostile modernity which threatened the sacred and reverential mood thought basic to national renewal. Yet mass-produced toys, tourism (and drama) must have led to easier acceptance of violence on behalf of an overriding cause.

Such undesirable consequences of the first world war did not infect all nations to the same degree. In France, for example, in spite of some similarities with Germany, the reaction was most often a condemnation of all war.⁷⁷ But in defeated Germany, buffeted by revolution and counter-revolution, one result of the cult of the fallen soldiers was undoubtedly an ever greater loss of sensitivity towards individual life and individual fate.

NOTES

1. Ad. Stern, ed., *Theodor Körners Werke* (Stuttgart 1890), I, 101.
2. John Meier, *Das Deutsche Soldatenlied im Felde* (Strasbourg 1916), 25ff.
3. Werner Schwipps, *Die Garnisonkirchen von Berlin und Potsdam* (Berlin 1964), 92; Stern, op. cit., 84.
4. Quoted in *Deutsche Soldaten und Volkslieder* (Berlin 1914), 46.
5. *Ibid.*, 451.
6. Walter Flex, 'Wolf Eschenlohr' in *Gesammelte Werke* (Munich n.d.), I, 376.
7. Cf. Ursula Kirchoff, *Die Darstellung des Festes im Roman um 1900* (Münster 1965).
8. Ernst Jünger, *The Storm of Steel* (New York 1975), 109.
9. George L. Mosse, *The Nationalisation of the Masses* (New York 1975), Chapter IV.
10. Richard Hamann and Jost Hermand, *Impressionismus* (Berlin 1960), 42.
11. Walter H. Sokel, *The Writer in Extremis* (New York 1964), 68.

12. Quoted in Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster, *Mein Kampf gegen das Militaristische und Nationalistische Deutschland* (Stuttgart 1920), 42.
13. Eva Kolnitzki, *Engagierter Expressionismus* (Stuttgart 1970), 171, n. 5.
14. Karl von Seeger, *Das Denkmal des Weltkrieges* (Stuttgart 1930), 22.
15. Willy Lange, *Deutsche Heldenhaine* (Leipzig 1915), 27; and *Das Deutsche Grabdenkmal* (April 1926), 11.
16. William K. Pfeiler, *War and the German Mind* (New York 1941), 86; Maurice Rieuneau, *Guerre et Révolution dans le Roman Français* (Klinsieck 1974), 16-17.
17. Hasko Zimmer, *Auf dem Altar des Vaterlands, Religion und Patriotismus in der deutschen Kriegsliteratur des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main 1917), 137; Walter Flex, *Vom grossen Abendmahl: Verse und Gedanken aus dem Feld* (Munich n.d.), 43.
18. Flex, *ibid.*, 15.
19. Max von Schenkendorf in Tim Klein, ed., *Die Befreiung 1813-1814-1815 Urkunden* etc. (Ebenhausen bei München 1913), 144.
20. D. E. Dryander, *Weihnachtsgedanken in der Kriegszeit* (Leipzig 1914), 21; *Die Feldgrauen, Kriegszeitschrift aus dem Schützengraben* (Mimeographed, February 1916), 30-31.
21. Walter Flex, *Vom grossen Abendmahl*, 15.
22. Ludwig Ganghofer, *Reise zur deutschen Front 1915* (Berlin 1915), 74.
23. *Ehrendenkmal der Deutschen Armee und Marine* (Berlin 1926), 654.
24. *Deutscher Ehrenhin für die Helden 1914-1918* (Leipzig 1931), *passim*.
25. *Westfälischer Feuerwehr-Verband: Gedenkbuch u. Ehrentafel* . . . (Olpe n.d.), 97.
26. Quoted in *Weltanschauliche Feierstunden der NSDAP* (Munich 1944), 137.
27. Rudolf G. Binding, *Rufe und Reden* (Potsdam 1938), 8.
28. Josef Magnus Wehner, *Langenmarck, Ein Vermächtnis* (Munich 1932), 6-7; Paul Alverdes, *Dank und Dienst* (Munich 1939), 259. From a speech, 'Das Vermächtnis von Langenmarck,' given in 1938.
29. The Hitler Youth took this from Walter Flex, i.e., *Deutscher Volkstrauertag 1926, Bericht des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgraberfürsorge e.V.* (Oldenburg 1926), 68.
30. Felix Lorenz, ed., *Heldenkränze, Gedächtnisbuch für die Gefallenen* (Berlin 1915), 8.
31. Rieneau, *op. cit.*, 138.
32. Karl Prümm, *Die Literatur des Soldatischen Nationalismus der 20er Jahre* (Kronberg, Taunus 1974), I, 103ff.
33. Siegfried Scharfe, eg., *Deutschland über Alles, Ehrenmale des Weltkrieges* (Königstein im Taunus and Leipzig 1940), n.p.
34. Edward Steere, 'Origins of the National Cemetery System', in *The Quarter-master Review*, XXII, XIII (1953), 132, 137-39.
35. *Beytrag zur Geschichte des Krieges in Preussen, Schlesien und Pohlen etc* (Amsterdam 1808), II, 262.
36. Ernst Tobias, *Wanderungen über Berliner Friedhöfe* (reprint of lecture 25 June 1935), 5; *Kriegergräber im Feld und Daheim* (Munich 1917), 150; Adolf Hüppi, *Kunst und Kult der Grabstätten* (Freiburg im Breisgau 1968), 408-09.
37. Johannes Schweizer, *Kirchhof und Friedhof, Eine Darstellung der beiden Hauptthemen europäischer Begrabnisstätten* (Linz an der Donau 1953), 152.
38. *Ibid.*, 153.

39. C. Cambry, *Rapport sur les Sépultres* (Paris 1792), 22.
40. Werner Schwipps, op. cit., passim, *Führer durch die Ausstellung für Kriegerehrung in Kirchen und auf Friedhöfen* (München 1916), 15ff.
41. Emil Högg, *Kriegergrab und Kriegerdenkmal* (Wittenberg 1915), 29.
42. *Deutsche Bau-Zeitung*, 51 (1917), 414-15.
43. Ibid., 415.
44. *Deutsche Bau-Zeitung*, 62 (1928), 112.
45. *Kriegergräber im Felde und daheim* (Munich 1917), 21.
46. Ibid., 22; *Deutsche Bau-Zeitung*, 62 (1928), 112.
47. Reprinted in ibid., 51 (1917), 183.
48. Ibid., 49 (1915), 192, 448.
49. von Seeger, op. cit., 30.
50. 'Die Kitschkanone', in *Ausstellung Krieg, Volk und Kunst* (Munich 1916), 46ff, 59.
51. Kurt Floericke, *Strategie und Taktik des Spiels mit Bleisoldaten* (Stuttgart 1917), 4; Ossian Elgstrom, *Wie man mit Zinnsoldaten Krieg führt* (Leipzig 1916) was popular in a French translation.
52. See Heinrich Gilardone, *Der Hias* (Berlin 1917); Hans Stosch-Sarasani, *Durch die Welt im Zirkuszelt* (Berlin 1940), 132, 150.
53. For battlefields as tourist attractions see, among many other accounts, the criticism of Karl Kraus, 'Tourist Trips to Hell' (1920), in Frederick Ungar, ed., *No Compromise, Selected Writings of Karl Kraus* (New York 1977), 69-74.
54. Even at the beginning of the war. See 'Umfrage des Hamburger Architekten und Ingenieur Vereins, "Wie finden wir unsere Friedhofskunst?"', *Deutsche Bau-Zeitung*, 48 (1914), 399.
55. *Der Freiwillige* (August 1977), 15.
56. See *Deutsche Bau-Zeitung*, 50 (1916), 490; ibid., 49 (1915), 500.
57. Ibid., 62 (1928), 112.
58. Stephan Ankenbrand, ed., *Heldenhaine, Heldenbäume* (Munich 1928), 28; Lange, op. cit., 109.
59. Mosse, op. cit., Chapter II; Lange, op. cit., 6.
60. Schweizer, op. cit., 182; R. R. Linhof, 'Die Kultur der Münchner Friedhofs-Anlagen', in *Wachsmuts Monatsheft für Baukunst*, III (1918-19), 200, 210ff; Stephan Steinlein, 'Hans Grässel', in *Kunst und Handwerk*, 63 (1912-13), 337-38; Grässel, cited by Hans Strobel, 'Gedanken über Friedhofsgestaltung', in *Deutsche Bau-Zeitung*, 53 (1920), 159. For a National Socialist architect Grässel was the father of all cemetery reform not because of the *Waldfriedhof* but because he harmonized individual graves with the design of the cemetery, creating a total work of art; H. Wernicke, 'Der Friedhof als Kultstätte', in *Gartenkunst*, 47 (1934), 168-69.
61. Cambry, op. cit., 8-9; Schweizer, op. cit., 182.
62. von Seeger, op. cit., 28.
63. Lange, op. cit., 5-7.
64. Cited in *Das Deutsche Grabmal* (December 1925), n.p.
65. Ibid. (August 1925), n.p.
66. *Deutsche Bau-Zeitung*, 62 (1928), 321, 322, 774; Wolfgang Ribbe, 'Flaggenstreit und Heiliger Hain', in Dietrich Kurze, ed., *Aus Theorie und Praxis der Geschichtswissenschaft: Festschrift für Hans Herzfeld zum 80. Geburtstag* (Berlin 1972), passim.

67. Jean Ajalbert, *Comment Glorifier les Morts pour la Patrie* (Paris 1916), 50-51.
68. Results of polls in *Études, Revue fondée en 1856 par des Pères de la Compagnie de Jésus* (July-August-September 1917), 303ff.
69. *Kriegsgräberfürsorge* (October 1932), 146.
70. Jacques Péricard, *Face à Face*, Introduction Maurice Barrès (Paris 1917), for the legend. Here also Roland Dorgelès, *Le Réveil des Morts* (Paris 1923), where the fallen come alive to avenge the betrayal of their trust. Henri Bonnet, in the *Almanach du Combattant* (Paris 1922), uses 'Debouts les Morts' for his appeal to consult veterans in reconstructing France.
71. Cited in Herbert Cysarz, *Zur Geistesgeschichte des Weltkrieges* (Halle-Saale 1931), 125.
72. J. Jehle, ed., *An was hat der heimkehrende Kriegsteilnehmer zu denken? Praktische Wegweise* (Munich 1918), 3.
73. Georg Preiser, a Hitlerjunge who had been killed, in *Die Fahne hoch!* N. 40 (1932), 14.
74. By: Participants in the Conference on the "War Experience", Gesamthochschule Siegen (16 July 1977).
75. It is relevant to notice that in England the ideal of cameraderie was as important as in Germany, indeed perhaps more so, for in 1916 it was actually forbidden to exhume the fallen for reburial by families who could afford to do so. *Silent Cities: an Exhibition of the Memorial and Cemetery Architecture of the Great War* (London, Royal Institute of British Architects, 1977), 9.
76. For a more detailed discussion of the war as Christian analogy, see George L. Mosse, 'The Jews and the German War Experience 1914-1918', in *The Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture*, 21 (New York 1977).
77. This is the thesis of the monumental work by Antoine Prost, *Les Anciens Combattants et la Société Française 1914-1939*, 3 vols. (Paris 1977).

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